

How U.S. Controls Bonn's

By Cay Brockdorff

BONN (UPI)—A force of supersonic F-104G jet fighter-bombers bearing the black Iron Cross of the West German Luftwaffe and armed with U.S. nuclear bombs sit at "quick reaction alert" in hangars at the end of the runway of a top-security base.

The planes are part of two nuclear strike wings of the

West German Air Force, completely assigned to NATO, already operative. Three more wings—which will make a total of 250 planes—are planned.

The United States, however, keeps its finger securely on the safety catch of the nuclear bombs.

The location of this base

and others with West German fighter-bombers, carrying the atomic bomb nestled between underslung fuel tanks on their camouflaged bellies, is kept secret for security reasons.

"But if you see a West German Air Force F-104G with two wing-tip fuel tanks and two belly fuel tanks you know it's one of our planes ear-

A-Bombers

marked to carry the bomb," a top-ranking Luftwaffe officer said.

U.S. Control System

The extra fuel would enable the otherwise limited-ranged Starfighters to strike deep into the heart of Communist Europe.

"But that's just half the story," he continued.

"Those jets are Luftwaffe long-range strike aircraft assigned to NATO and they physically carry the bomb when they are on quick reaction alert.

"But when they carry the bomb they cease to be German planes for all practical purposes. They become planes in American custody.

"An intricate system of controls makes sure that—under no circumstances—can they take off unless the President of the United States flashes the word through American channels."

If the command did come from the American President, the jets would take off at a moment's notice carrying their nuclear cargo with West German pilots at the controls.

West German pilots stand by in round-the-clock combat readiness in a "ready room" near each cluster of the fighter-bombers. They wear their G-suits (pressure suits) and parachute packs at all times. Helmets and oxygen masks are within arm's reach. Electronic gear in their planes is kept warmed up.

Secret Agreement

But between the pilots and their A-armed planes stand

U.S. Air Force officers and men whose actions are determined by a U.S.-West German agreement and, ultimately, the American President.

Details of the agreement are secret. But reliable sources said it called for rigging U.S. nuclear bombs under a small number of West German planes to save the time it

would otherwise take to haul the missiles from bunkers and install them in the event of an emergency.

The aim is to make the Western allied nuclear deterrent convincing to the Soviets, the sources said.

"The Soviets would hardly fear a quick military reaction if our A-bombs were all locked away in bunkers," one German source said. "This way some bombs are always ready to go—and yet under American lock and key just the same."

U.S. Air Force officers at the West German bases, who have "a chain of command kept secret even from us," are needed to arm the bombs under the German planes, he said.

In addition, the sentries who guard the nuclear-armed Luftwaffe planes are Americans, not Germans, he said.

"Our personnel know American orders are shoot to kill if an unauthorized person tries to approach these planes," the German officer said.

NATO requirements project a buildup of the West German Air Force to five nuclear strike wings. With each wing comprising 36 combat-ready aircraft and 14 in reserve, West Germany will eventually have a total of 250 planes able to carry the American nuclear bomb.